

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 2

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DEAR Member,—It was suggested in last week's Supplement that in the fierce flames of war God is revealing the false values which are destroying the life of our civilisation. This could hardly be brought home to us more vividly than by the vast plans for the removal of populations from their ancestral home.

THE TRANSFER OF POPULATIONS

Herr Hitler, in his speech to the Reichstag, announced his intention of undertaking a wholesale resettlement of nationalities. He proposed to create a frontier of the Reich which would correspond with historical, ethnographic, and economic realities, and to regulate in accordance with this principle the whole living space extending into practically all countries in South-Eastern Europe. The deal between Germany and Italy, which is driving the people of the South Tyrol from the lands they have cultivated for generations, has now been followed by the forcible removal of the German populations from the Baltic countries. If the same policy is followed, as appears to be intended in regard to the German minorities in Rumania, Yugo-Slavia and Hungary, two millions more will be affected. Room will doubtless be found for a large proportion of these in Poland and Czecho-Slovakia, which will thus acquire German populations. To what extent the forcible removal of Poles and Czechs to Russia or elsewhere will be carried out the future alone can show.

As the *New English Weekly* says in some pungent paragraphs "this uprooting of millions of families from their traditional homelands where their national history has been wrought out, and where their individual hopes, memories and affections lie, is a policy the mere consideration of which takes us outside the Christian era altogether and back into the history of Asiatic despotisms."

I am not suggesting that even the large-scale transfer of populations may not in certain circumstances be a means of advancing human welfare. But in the present instance it is being carried out to further political ambitions and under conditions which cause untold misery and hardship. These ruthless measures reveal how completely the values of Christendom have become submerged. The biological factor of race, which man shares with the animal and vegetable kingdoms, is exalted above the human values of tradition and mutual tolerance. Lord Acton held that the co-existence of different nations under the same government was one of the chief bulwarks of liberty and a main instrument of civilisation.

But to judge these events fairly we must not forget that we have been content for generations to make similar sacrifices to the Moloch not of race but of economic efficiency. We have but to recall the sum of misery resulting from the enclosure acts of the eighteenth century, the destruction of the peasantry in wide areas, the process of

industrialisation, the exploitation of child labour, the seizure of African lands, and the prevailing indifference to the erosion and deterioration of the soil which is going on all the time in our Empire and elsewhere, and which threatens the destruction of men's livelihood and homes.

CHAPLAINS TO THE FORCES

I had an interesting talk the other day with the Chaplain of the Fleet. The inner life of the Navy is a sealed book to most landsmen. It does not require much imagination, however, to realise that in the closely knit community which is called a ship's company a Christian minister has an almost unique opportunity. "Shut up in a tin box" with his people, his life is known and read of all men. The sailor, like other people, judges Christianity by the lives of those who profess it. All the larger ships carry chaplains. In the case of destroyers there is a chaplain in one of the ships of the flotilla. The chaplain of a submarine flotilla is accommodated in the depot ship. A certain number of chaplains are serving ashore in barracks, training establishments and naval hospitals.

I have also had a talk with the Chaplain-General, about the work of chaplains in the army and the provision to meet its spiritual needs.

We may serve those carrying on these important ministries by remembering them understandingly in our prayers.

THE NEWS-LETTER

When it was decided to issue the *News-Letter* none of us had any idea of the kind of reception it would meet with. The response has been more encouraging than we dared to hope. In the fortnight since the publication of the preliminary issue the number of subscribers has reached 3,560. More than sixty per cent. of these have had faith enough in the venture to subscribe for a year. I am told that a number of people subscribed only for six months because they thought that the war might be over in that time. But we intend to carry on after the war. The problems that will confront us when peace is concluded are not likely to be less acute than those of the war period.

We have received several hundred letters about the *News-Letter*. These are full of appreciation and gratitude, and many of them contain valuable suggestions and constructive criticism. I cannot answer all letters personally, but they have all been read and digested. My colleagues and I are very grateful both for the encouragement and the criticism. We want also to express our thanks to the secular and religious Press for the generosity of their notice of the *News-Letter*.

The launching of the letter under war conditions without offices of our own and with a ridiculously small staff was no easy job. In spite of this, the first number was in the hands of about 36,000 people exactly three weeks after the decision to publish it was taken. Miss Iredale succeeded in collecting a body of voluntary workers, and all the business of despatching the first number was done by them. Eight of them, all young, were on the job for a fortnight, paying all their own expenses and working all kinds of hours. On the top of this, they made a substantial money contribution to our funds.

No words can express our debt to the Student Christian Movement, at whose headquarters we had our temporary offices. We paid rent for only one room but they managed to find accommodation for as many people as each day brought together and lent us every kind of aid.

I suggest that you should keep the issues of the *News-Letter* on file for reference. The discussion of the subjects dealt with in the letters and supplements will go on

actively, and you are likely to want to refer back to the initial statement. We are going into the question of a case for filing the letters and I shall let you know about it in a week or two.

We have had letters from a number of people who are forming groups for the study of the letter, and enquire whether it can be supplied in quantities at special rates. We are most anxious to encourage the formation of groups, but the question of a special rate is not an easy one to decide in view of the rising costs of paper. We are looking into the matter and will make an announcement as soon as we can.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENTS?

Rosalind Murry is writing in the *Tablet* a "Wartime Journal." In the first instalment she asks a question that deserves to be pondered. It is the question what are the really important events. Even Christians are so much under the spirit of the age that they are apt to take for granted that the important happenings are outward events—the movements of armies and affairs of state. We tend to disregard the invisible, intangible changes. Yet if man is a spiritual being whose real existence consists in his relation to God and to other persons, the true significance of outward events lies in the ways they affect the souls of men. It is the deep and slow shift in men's consciousness and in their scale of values that in the long run produces the most far-reaching changes in the outer world.

THE SUPPLEMENT

I explained in the preliminary number that the purpose of the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life under whose auspices the *News-Letter* is published, is to create new links between organised religion and the general life of the community. If this is to be done, those of us who belong to the churches must learn to listen to those who stand outside. By this I mean really to listen, so that our present outlook is corrected and enlarged by what they think and feel. It is quite in accord, therefore, with the policy of the *News-Letter* that the contribution to the Supplement this week should be a letter from one of my friends who is not associated with any church. The writer, Geoffrey Vickers, is the moving spirit in the Association for Service and Reconstruction, which he recently founded with a group of friends in the City of London. He is a lawyer by profession. I have learned much from him, and I hope you also may find suggestion and help in his stimulating letter.

The paper on "Evacuation—a Social Landmark" will come in the next issue.

Yours sincerely,

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LONDON, N.W.1.

Service of the Interned. "Barbed-wire illness" was the name coined during the last war to denote the state of depression, sometimes amounting to spiritual collapse, into which prisoners of war and interned aliens were apt to sink. The essential spiritual need of the prisoner is some kind of touch with the world outside the wire, which will maintain his sense of belonging to the community of men and the family of God.

In two respects the conditions under which this ministry must be provided are better than they were twenty-five years ago. The Geneva Convention of 1929 explicitly provides that accredited representatives of certain voluntary bodies shall have access to them and reasonable facilities for carrying out their humane task. Although this provision does not cover civilian internees, the British Government has declared its intention of according to them not less favourable treatment than to prisoners of war. Again, in the interval since the last war the international Christian Movement has developed organs through which the contribution of the Protestant Churches can be effectively made. The Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches is co-operating with the international headquarters of other bodies dealing with the problems.

In this country, at the instance of the Government departments concerned, a committee is being set up to secure co-ordination of the various welfare services, and to be in liaison with the Government's internment camps committee. The Commission of the Churches on International Friendship and Social responsibility, the Y.M.C.A., the British Red Cross Society, and other bodies will be represented on the liaison committee.

The German Evangelical Church. Some of the utterances of church leaders in Germany and private letters from Christians in Germany to friends in neutral countries show how completely sections of Christian opinion have been misled by the propaganda of the German Government. On the other hand there is reliable information that there is a considerable number of earnest Christians, including some lay people in positions of influence, who are standing together in an effort to keep true religion alive. These are found among members of the Confessional Church, of the Lutheran group, and even among the German Christians. This body of opinion is concerned

not only that the Christian spirit should be kept alive but also that the tradition of Western culture should be preserved, and that Germany should remain within the community of Western nations. There are grounds for believing that between this body of opinion and influential sections of opinion in Great Britain and France regarding the terms of peace much common ground might be found.

The latest news regarding Pastor Niemöller is that the conditions of his confinement have become easier, and that his wife is able to visit him twice a week instead of once a month.

Czecho-Slovakia. Accounts have appeared in the Press of numerous political arrests in Czecho-Slovakia and of the incessant activities of the Gestapo. A letter received from a young minister of the Czecho-Slovak church residing abroad, says that all religious liberty has completely disappeared. The hostility of the rulers is directed both against the Roman Catholic and the Evangelical Churches. Many hundreds of priests have been recently arrested and some were seriously maltreated. Refusal to hoist the Nazi flag on church buildings or any utterance which the police regard as "patriotic" is a reason for sending the offender to a concentration camp. In the midst of these trials, there are evidences of intensified religious life.

From The Postbag.

"The *News-Letter* will give us all a much greater sense of widespread co-operation. At the moment many people who want to face these issues are isolated in their own particular parish, and are hardly conscious of the movement of thought which must be going on everywhere."

"A study circle of young teachers and others meets here once a month. I think that most of the members will like to take the *Christian News-Letter*, and we can discuss together points from it."

"I propose to make the *News-Letter* the basis for weekly discussion with a large body of my congregation which meets together each Wednesday."

"The train of human progress is manifestly leaving for an unknown destination. The trouble with most of us clergy is that, while most of us have gone to see it off, we have taken care to purchase only a platform ticket."

A COMMUNITY WITH A PURPOSE

WHERE ARE WE GOING ?

My Dear Oldham,—

You ask me what I regard as the meaning and purpose of the war.

REVOLUTIONARY GERMANY

I begin by looking at revolutionary Germany, and I distinguish three very different elements. The first is the revolutionary element. It is the most conspicuous and the least significant feature, for it is common to all revolutions, whether made by Cromwell or Lenin or Hitler. The type of men who come to power in times of violence are violent men. Most revolutionaries are bound to be gangsters, and to do as gangsters do. They are hateful and inevitable, and they last as long as the revolutionary phase of the revolution. It is futile to condemn a revolution because it is conducted by revolutionaries, and still more futile to try to coerce them into being gentlemen. It is futile even to destroy them, unless, of course, you want to destroy the revolution as such, in which case killing its leaders may, or may not, help.

The second element is the idolatrous element. This particular revolution makes a god of the State both in theory and in practice. This is idolatry and a sin against the spirit of man. It is almost the only sort of offence towards which tolerance is a vice. It justifies the reactions of a Hebrew prophet. It is peculiar to the Nazi revolution. The French revolution had its nationalist phase, but its revolutionaries taught and believed in human equality and the rights of man.

The Nazis teach and believe the opposite.

The third element is the "State-socialising" element, based on conceptions of social responsibility and the common will. This is an attempt to answer a crying need of the whole Western world. I have no doubt that within a generation we in Britain will be much farther along this road than the Germans; and it will be a very good thing. The slogans of the revolution in this field—"Gemeines vor Eigenes," "Kraft durch Freude," do not shock us and might well interest us more than they do. And the whole governmental machinery which is used for the purpose is in part an experiment in the use of powers which every State has got to learn to use for good—however much it may run counter to our liberal traditions.

THE SOCIALISATION OF THE STATE

The socialising of the State, which includes abolishing the mental gulf between the State regarded as the machine of government and the totality of the supposedly self-governing citizens, is very much overdue. We come to it slowly, because it involves scrapping a cherished belief, which I would rather call the doctrine of non-interference than the love of liberty. We are further hindered by the fact that the Germans have produced as an example of the socialised State a new-fangled Baal, whose priests are gunmen; so that we, instead of trying to do it better, are struggling against doing it at

all—or were before the war resolved our scruples.

Thus we are in the embarrassing position of fighting against a movement which in this particular aspect—the conscious attempt to “socialise” the State—is ahead of us in the historical process. The mere fact of being at war is hurrying us along the same road. Everyone realises this when they say that our greatest danger is to “go totalitarian,” like the enemy. Few realise that the vital question is not whether we shall become a completely socialised State but by what spirit we shall be animated when that has occurred. This is a question of purpose.

THE QUESTION OF PURPOSE

For four centuries the Western world has increased power and opportunity, believing that it must thereby increase well-being and freedom. This belief was based on the growing conviction (which crystallised in a creed in the nineteenth century) that men “naturally” willed their own good, and that their wills when enlightened by reason would “naturally” be consistent. For some time both experience and science seemed to confirm these assumptions. Then the evidence began to point the other way. We are at the point when doubt is spreading from the few to the many, and the whole edifice of political, economic, social and moral assumptions is beginning to fall.

It would, of course, take a book to do justice to this stupendous wild-goose chase, which has produced more and more techniques for doing things and left fewer and fewer criteria for deciding what is worth doing. The transition from status to contract tended to produce a society in which all duties were optional and all rights had to be bought. This was mistaken for freedom. The development of money and markets provided a mechanism

by which the desires of the propertied in the economic field could be compared. This mechanism was mistaken for a measure of economic value. Political democracy developed a technique for counting heads. This was mistaken for the secret of collective action.

The angle from which the utilitarians approached the problems of society was characteristic of people who never dreamed that men who could weigh the stars could not weigh happiness; and their impulse reached every corner of politics and ethics. When the facts of evolution were first noticed they were immediately made the basis of a congenial philosophy, in which the world was represented as a cosmic Manchester, where the laws of supply and demand in thin biological disguises brought the “fittest” inevitably to the top.

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to this age—to its science, which has made it possible for us to create a race of far greater potential than ourselves; to its commercialism, which has greatly mitigated the bitterness of the struggle for power by transmuting it into a struggle for wealth. But at the moment I—like the world in general—am concerned with its deficiency. Its deficiency is its lack of a common purpose capable of holding it together. There is no order without purpose; there is no force without will. The Nazis are right when they shout about purpose and will, and the only way to beat them or to earn the right to beat them—is to develop a nobler purpose and a stronger will.

The only sort of common purpose which will hold people together is one which makes them responsible both for the future and for each other. To do this it must give them a sense of community and continuity, must make them feel members one of another, with their roots in the past and the future for their

making. To do this it must set before them ends which all can share and none can attain alone, which can never be once for all attained, yet which are continually satisfying to pursue.

Every community which achieves anything, whether it be a nation, a class or a church, has such a purpose, and what it achieves reflects the quality of its purpose, which again reflects its belief of what man is and might be. The rulers of Germany appear to believe that man is an infinitely plastic creature, who can be made without limit to like what he is going to get and to will what he is scheduled to do. I believe that this is untrue. I believe that man, for all his variety, has needs which cannot be denied; and that the task of government is to make a society in which these needs can be satisfied. I believe that the purpose which might make such a society in Britain is also the purpose which could both win the war and make a decent peace.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRUE PURPOSE

This letter has already escaped from all decent bounds of length, and I will not enlarge here on the details of this purpose which I want to see working, but I will mention the aspects which I think are likely to be forgotten.

1. It must be a national purpose. It is no good being afraid of nationalism. The people who live in this island grow in a soil thousands of years deep, and there is as yet no basis for a wider community comparable in intensity with that which already exists here; and even that is inadequate. A community with real coherence may be a blessing or a curse to the world according to how it behaves, but an incoherent society is only a general nuisance.

2. It must be an educative purpose. A community of free men is only possible if their individual expectations

and desires are more or less consistent as well as more or less satisfying. No automatic regulator ensures that they shall be so; but the capacity for virtue can be trained. The Nazis use the educational machinery to enslave. We, if we want a free society, must use the same machinery to make men who will be fit to be free. We are frightened of ever trying to teach people what to expect of themselves and each other; and we are all the more frightened since the Nazis showed how propaganda can enslave men's minds. But I'm sure we must take the risk. A free country isn't just a country where people can grumble without being sent to prison; it is a country where they both have and desire the opportunities they need. We don't deserve to be free in that positive sense if we haven't the courage to teach people to want the opportunities which they ought to have.

3. It must be a social purpose. Men, being essentially separate yet essentially incomplete, are always swinging between the fear of being enslaved and the fear of being isolated. Hence the central difficulty of government is to make society hang together without violating the integrity of the individual, to give men a place in society without making them its slaves. Since we are now in full cry towards a social state—and hence towards the danger of enslavement rather than the danger of isolation—the urgent need is for vision of what such a state should be and of the mutual obligations which must be recognised if it is to achieve a freedom more worth having than liberal democracy, let alone Nazidom. The last phase of English history began with the Bill of Rights. The new phase demands a Bill of Duties.

Blind forces are making the social state. These are the forces generated by the unstable tensions which exist in our present society and which must grow

daily greater. The chief of these as it seems to me are the inconsistency between the economic and the social effects of industry; the conflict between the conceptions of men as self-governing citizens and men as a commodity in the labour market; and the lack of touch between the Government as the agent responsible for solving social problems and the forces outside Government by which these problems are constantly being set. These tensions can only be resolved, as it seems to me, by uniting governmental and non-governmental forces in a common purpose which will make self-government a reality on all planes of activity. (Even before the war the line of demarcation between government and non-government activity was becoming increasingly blurred.) The quality of the purpose, however, cannot be left to chance. Blind forces may be making the social state, but only intelligence and faith can shape it.

I believe that human nature for all its variety is something specific and positive and limited, that it can find satisfaction in some ways and not in others and that freedom is the opportunity to live in accordance with its needs. I believe that these needs are social as well as individual and that freedom in the social sphere depends both on making these opportunities by legislation and public opinion and on teaching men to use them. I believe that the new order will be designed deliberately to satisfy certain material and spiritual needs, just as are the "orders" in Soviet Russia and Germany, and that we have got both to choose what those needs are to be and to have the courage to teach them as being good. Our success will depend on the intelligence with which we assess

the best of which men are capable—not men in general, but men in England to-morrow—and the faith with which we back our judgment.

THE TASK OF THE CHURCHES

As you ask me how I think the Churches could help to make the new order, I would say, speaking as an outsider, that I hope they will make two contributions of outstanding importance. The first is to emphasise the responsibility of men for the shape of society. I know how difficult this question is. All the same, it seems clear that the attitude of mind with which Christians regarded a famine in the 12th century is not an appropriate reaction to, say, unemployment in the 20th century.

The other contribution is to insist on an adequately noble view of what man is and might be. Without faith in man, the collapse of liberal optimism leads to the opposite extreme—to contempt for the individual, to State idolatry and to all the violations of human personality which are associated with the Nazi régime. It also leads inevitably to gangster rule and the cult of power, since it offers no nobler basis for human society. The Churches are the guardians of a conception of man which alone can give our social revolution a nobler quality than that of Bolshevik or Nazi, and they should be capable of stating it in the language which the age can understand. Only by doing so can they take sides against Nazi idolatry without fighting a losing and unworthy battle for a status quo which is already passing away.

Yours ever,

GEOFFREY VICKERS.

London, October 26, 1939.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

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